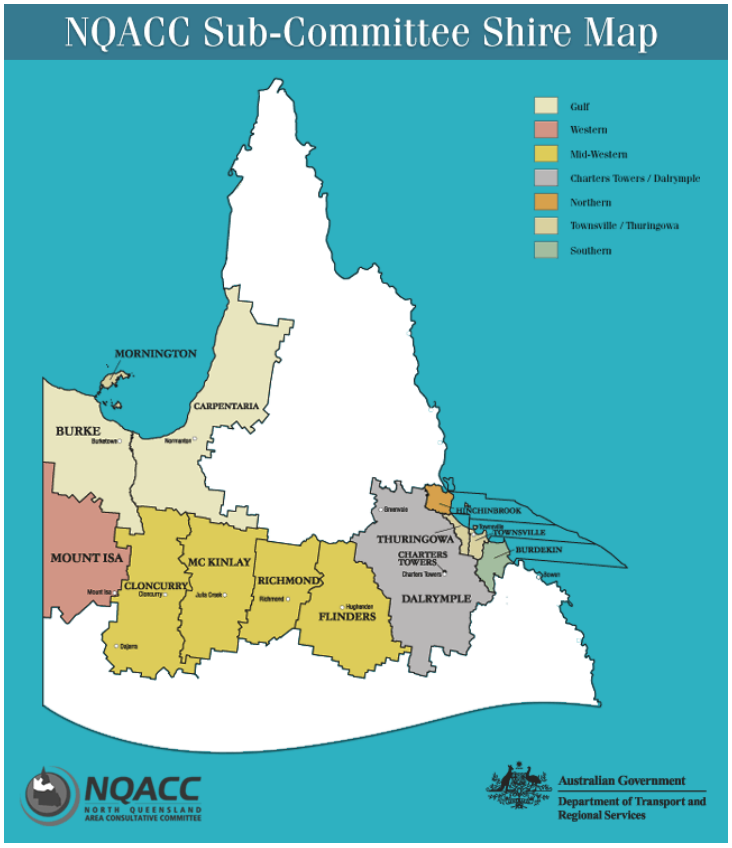
Submission to the Inquiry into the Integration of Regional Rail and Road Freight Transport and Their Interface with Ports

1.0 Introduction

North Queensland Area Consultative Committee is a key facilitator of regional development for the Australian Government in North Queensland. The NQACC members and staff work in partnership with government, business and the community to promote the strategies of economic, environmental and social development, as well as facilitating the Regional Partnerships grant funding program to the region.

NQACC's region covers an area of 388,158 square kilometres. Along the Queensland coast from Ingham in the north, to Burdekin in the south, west to Mt Isa and up to Burketown and Normanton in the Gulf of Carpentaria. NQACC has 7 sub-committees and there are 14 local authorities in our area..

Sub-Committees play a major role as the face of the NQACC in the region. They comment on expressions of interest for projects from within their region, act as a conduit for information to and from the region and are an integral part of the NQACC operations.



In compiling this submission NQACC has consulted with local government authorities, industry and sub-committees within the region.

2.0 Terms of Reference

- ***The role of Australia's regional arterial road and rail network in the national in the national freight transport task.***

a) Cane is cut and hauled from the farm to cane railway sidings (Herbert). These haul-outs are mainly large tippers carrying up to 20 tonne and they regularly exceed loading capacity. They are given confessional loadings (over-weight loadings) provided they use special floatation tyres, but often they run on conventional farm tyres in which case extraordinary damage is caused to the road network.

- ***The relationship and co-ordination between Australia's road and rail networks and their connectivity to ports.***
- ***Policies and measures required to assist in achieving greater efficiency in the Australian transport network, with particular reference to:***

o ***Land transport access to port***

a) Upgrading of the regional priority road access, being the Karumba – Normanton – Cloncurry Road, to a standard which facilitates the safe and economical transportation of goods (road-train capacity) from and to the regional transportation network hub of Cloncurry. In that regard the road connection needs to be widened and strengthened and flooding disruption minimized in order to ensure reasonable continuity of supply and access.

b) Measures are required to allow third party access to rail networks.

c) Industry needs assurances surrounding future tariffs for the rail transportation of raw materials.

d) With regards to future rail network expansion (wagons and additional passing lanes), policy is required to ensure that expansion is possible in timeframes required by industry.

o ***Capacity and operation of major ports***

a) The integrated public transportation system will in some cases be complemented by private transportation systems, eg. The lead/zinc slurry line from Century Mine to Karumba, and the role of such alternative modes does not diminish the need for a high standard of road access.

In Karumba's case the support infrastructure required to service the dewatering and barging process requires substantial servicing and a viable community to ensure its ongoing operations.

o ***Movements of bulk export commodities such as grain & coal***

a) Policy should support the private off-road transportation of minerals as it substantially eases the cost and safety aspects of on-road haulage.

b) Rail transport must be considered as the preferred long distance freight carrier of the future.

c) Cane cut and hauled from the farm to cane railway sidings (Herbert). These haul-outs are mainly large tippers carrying up to 20 tonne and they regularly exceed loading capacity. They are given confessional loadings provided they use special floatation tyres, but often they run on conventional farm tyres in which case extraordinary damage is caused to the road network. Even if not overweight the road network was/is designed to suit the conventional "roll-on roll-off" haulout which has almost disappeared, in the quest for bigger equipment which reduces haul out costs but impacts heavily on our road maintenance.

- ***The role of intermodal freight hubs in regional areas***

a) There is a need to improve and encourage the intermodal freight hub concept throughout Australia, recognize Mt Isa as a location for a hub and the arrival of the Melbourne to Darwin rail line can add greatly to the success of the intermodal freight hubs.

- ***Opportunities to achieve greater efficiency in the use of existing infrastructure; and***

a) Opportunity for Government Policy to encourage greater efficiency and economy in use of the transportation network by minimizing safety risk and the cost of long distance haulage by use of more direct routes, e.g. fuel imports through Karumba for the Gulf, and the North West mineral province, Mount Isa region. (Currently there are three brands' of fuel brought into Karumba, Shell by sea and both BP and Mobil by road all the way from the east coast, some 800 kilometres minimum.)

b) An examination of the Asian shipping lanes suggests that there is substantial scope to access more efficient and economical supply lines by using our more northern ports such as Darwin and Karumba, and perhaps all levels of Government should have a greater focus on incentives/policies to minimise the loading on our transportation network rather than the totally unregulated transport environment we now have, with excessive demands on all road systems because routes and supply lines are entirely optional.

c) As population growth in cities and on the coast continues, replacing road transport with rail is a more attractive option.

d) The successful use of government and industry funds will enable the Herbert sugar rail network to operate at a lower cost base and continue to be sustainable into the future. Fewer sidings may place an increased amount of industry vehicles onto the public road network.

e) Mt Isa to Townsville – there is a need to allow for additional capacity by increasing train length.

- ***Possible advantages from the use of intelligent tracking technology***

- ***The role of the three levels of Government and the private sector in providing and maintaining the regional transport network.***